

Provo's Tabernacles Noted in Centennial Book

by Oliver R. Smith

The historic Provo Tabernacle, which replaced an earlier structure in the center of the city, is approaching the centennial of the start of its construction in the spring of 1883.

And coming off the press in March to mark the anniversary will be a new book entitled "Provo's Two Tabernacles and the People Who Built Them." Its author is N. LaVerl Christensen, editor emeritus of the Provo Herald and a member of the Brigham Young Chapter of the Sons of Utah Pioneers.

Most present-day residents have never heard of the Provo Meeting House, often called the "Old Tabernacle," which once stood on the Tabernacle Block facing Center Street. Predating even the famed Salt Lake Tabernacle, the adobe structure was dedicated in 1867 by John Taylor with President Brigham Young in charge.

It was Provo's most resplendent building for many years, until overshadowed by the present Tabernacle which was erected at the south end of the block to face Academy (now University) Avenue. The old Meeting House was dismantled in 1918-19.

The new book tells the story of both edifices. It also gives pertinent glimpses into the 1849 establishment of Fort Utah (the original name of the Provo settlement) and the development of Utah Stake which for 50 years encompassed all of Utah Valley, and for a shorter time the four settlements in Heber Valley as well.

Sixty-seven stakes and more than 500 wards now function in that area. The Tabernacle is now used each week for conferences of stakes in the immediate Provo area.

The present Provo Tabernacle was in use for a memorial service for the late President Ulysses S. Grant in August of 1885, and for the 56th and 57th General Conferences of the Church in 1886 and 1887. In addition to church meetings, it has served through the years as a cultural center for the community — housing public meetings, concerts, dramas, pageants, and until 1941



In this 1911 photo are seen both the old Provo Meeting House, left foreground, and the newer Tabernacle, at right. In 1917, the large central tower was removed for structural safety.

the graduation exercises for Brigham Young University.

Some interesting facts from the book: every LDS president except Joseph Smith appeared on the stand of either the old or new Tabernacle . . . President William Howard Taft once gave a speech in the present building . . . for a few months during the threatened invasion of Johnston's Army the Church made its temporary headquarters in Provo . . . the Tabernacle's architect was the same one who designed the Salt Lake Theater and the Manti Temple . . . but the massive central tower on the Tabernacle had to be removed in 1917.

The new history volume will contain 200 pages in 8 1/2 by 11-inch format with a hardback cover featuring exterior views of the two Tabernacles. It will include 65 photos, many of them exceedingly rare.

The Provo East Stake is sponsoring the publication as a non-profit service project — both to the author and the stake. Orders may be directed to M. Ephraim Hatch, Stake Clerk, 883 North 1200 East, Provo, UT 84604.

Books are priced at \$14 each, postpaid.

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The National Society of SUP became a co-sponsor with Weber State College of the recently reorganized William Pitt Brass Band.

Now revived it will again concertrize on a horse-drawn carriage in the Days of '47 Parade, in our SUP Heritage Hall, at Weber State College and at many other places of reknown as it serves the chapters of the National Society of SUP. Already it has scheduled the following free concerts for 1983:

Wednesday, March 16, 8 p.m., Austad Auditorium, Weber State College, Ogden, Utah.

Tuesday, March 22, 7:30 p.m., Ogden Tabernacle.

Wednesday, May 25, 8 p.m., Austad Auditorium, Weber State College, Ogden.

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